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# homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE

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SPECIAL HOMEMAKERS' CHAT TO FLOOD REGIONS

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RELEASE IMMEDIATE

Subject: "REPAIRING FLOOD-DAMAGED FURNITURE." Information from wood experts and chemists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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The problem today is furniture damaged by flood water...what you can do to bring it back in shape again. The wood may have warped...the joints may have come apart where water loosened the glue...the finish may be stained or bruised...layers of veneer may be loose...upholstery may be faded or stained...stuffing under the upholstery may have an unpleasant odor...and leather on furniture may be hard, stiff, likely to crack. What to do about it?

To begin with, get any mud or other dirt washed off the furniture so you can tell just how much damage there is...what repairs you can make at home...what you will have to send out to a repair expert. Take all the furniture outdoors. Remove drawers, slides, or other moving parts. Many drawers will stick tight. Don't force them with a screw-driver or chisel from the front where dents in the fine wood will show. Instead, remove the back of the furniture and push out drawers or other moving parts from behind. Those that still stick don't force too much. They will loosen as the wood dries out. Wash all the furniture, inside and out, to get mud and other dirt off. Wipe with a dry, clean cloth. Then bring the furniture back inside the house.

Your first impulse may be to leave the damp furniture where the hot sun will dry it out fast. But that is a mistake. Wet wood must dry slowly, or it will twist out of shape and even split along the grain. So let the furniture dry out slowly indoors.

Some furniture, your chairs especially, may need regluing. Some joints are



easy enough to glue back in place, but others will not hold unless you use clamps after gluing. Better consult a cabinet-maker before you try any very difficult gluing jobs. Veneered furniture especially should go to an expert for repairs. When layers of veneered wood come apart, only special equipment and the skill of an expert can put them together again successfully.

Now about the finish on the wood. Whether the finish in varnish, shellac, paint, oil or wax, it is pretty sure to have suffered some damage. The necessary washing and cleaning after the flood may affect the finish as well as the flood water itself. Usually you will have to remove the old finish completely and do a complete refinishing job. But some furniture may have suffered just from dampness--or from small amounts of water standing on top. If furniture like this was varnished, it will have white spots here and there. Those white water spots you can remove by rubbing with a soft cloth dampened in spirits of camphor or essence of peppermint...or by a damp cloth with 2 or 3 drops of weak ammonia on it. After you have removed the spots, rub the surface with furniture polish. Water-damaged upholstered furniture is a special repair problem, because not only the wood but also the inside stuffing and outside fabric cover probably suffered. If the upholstery has been standing damp for some time, it has probably started to mildew and the stuffing inside may have a strong odor. If the stuffing has an odor, it will need replacing with new stuffing. This means a complete re-upholstery job. But many housewives these days know how to upholster at home. The fabric cover of the upholstery may be faded or stained. You may be able to wash most of the stain out if the fabric is washable. And if the fabric has faded from the water, you may be able to dye it. Or you may need new fabric entirely. Sometimes a slip cover is the simplest way to cover stained upholstery until you have time for a new upholstery job.

Springs in wet furniture are likely to be rusty as are all metal parts. Rub off the rust with sandpaper and oil the springs. Other metal parts you might





cover with wax. Where wood is still wet, don't try to tighten screws. Wait until the wood dries. Rub any metal furniture that has rusted with fine sandpaper or scouring powder...then repainting or waxing over the surface. You can buy special anti-rust paint at paint stores these days.

Now one more furniture problem: What to do about leather and imitation leather on furniture that has been damaged by flood water.

After leather gets wet, it dries stiff and hard...loses its flexibility so cracks easily. Mud and other substances in the water leave stains on leather. To save leather from getting hard and stiff, you want to lubricate it with oil or wax while it is still wet. Then it will dry soft and pliable.

A good saddle soap both cleans and lubricates leather, because it contains not only soap but some oil and wax as well. So after brushing or perhaps washing off the worst mud and dirt with a damp cloth, then use saddle soap on the leather. Rub it in well. Then polish with a soft cloth. Leave some of the soap on the leather to allow for a polish and keep the leather soft and flexible.

If you don't use saddle soap, you can wash the leather with thick mild soapsuds, taking care not to use much water. Wipe with a damp cloth. Then while the leather is still damp, rub a very little castor oil into it. Castor oil penetrates leather...sinks right down in. A few days after oiling, you can put paste floor-wax on the leather and polish it. Castor oil is the only oil that will take a wax coating on top.

Now about imitation leather. Scrub the fabric with a thick lather of mild soap. Rinse with clean warm water and wipe dry. Allow it to stand in the sun or by an open window until it is thoroughly dry. Then apply a thin coat of shellac over the surface.

Perhaps these tips will help you decide what repairs you can do well enough at home to be worth the time you spend...what furniture is valuable enough to be worth the price of repairs by an expert...and what is so badly damaged or of so little value that it is not worth repairing.

